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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [SOCI](#) [UP](#)
SUBJECT: TENSIONS IN CRIMEA OVER DISPUTED LAND

Classified By: Political Counselor Colin Cleary for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

Summary -----

¶1. (C) Tensions between Crimean Tatars and Crimean authorities over disputed land in Simferopol, which had the potential to erupt into violence, appear to be easing. Defense Minister Yekhanurov has gotten personally involved in seeking a peaceful solution. The Ministry of Defense is reported to have transferred land occupied by Crimean Tatar squatters to the City of Simferopol, which in turn could turn it over to the Crimean Tatar community for use in a settlement. End Summary.

Crimean Authorities Plan Eviction -----

¶2. (U) The Crimean Tatar Mejlis (Council) appealed to senior GOU leaders and the international community on January 27 to prevent the forceful eviction of Crimean Tatar squatters from a settlement in the city of Simferopol (capital of Crimea). The Mejlis claimed that police and military units planned to demolish homes and a mosque and turn the land over to commercial developers. The settlement, which had been established in 2006 on land belonging to the MOD, had been in the process of being transferred to the city for several years. According to Crimean Tatar leaders, Simferopol authorities secretly and prematurely allocated the land to commercial developers. The planned eviction was to fulfill a court order turning over the land to commercial interests.

Tensions Rise -----

¶3. (SBU) Tensions rose January 27-29 as approximately 1000-3000 Crimean Tatars gathered at the settlement to defy the eviction order. Embassy contacts in Crimea expressed concern about possible violent clashes and felt that extremists on both sides might use the dispute to inflame the situation. Deputy Mejlis Leader Refat Chubarov publicly called for peaceful settlement of the dispute and asked that the Crimean Tatar community receive the eight hectares in currently occupies. Chubarov explained that the remaining 37 hectares of the MOD land would be plenty for commercial development. Although he appealed for calm, Chubarov warned that tens of thousands of Tatars would come to protect the mosque on the site if there were prospect of the mosque's demolition.

DefMin Involved -----

¶4. (C) The Ambassador raised the issue with Minister of Defense Yekhanurov during a January 28 meeting. Yekhanurov was well aware of the situation, adding that he had a map of the disputed location on his desk. He said he had already conducted talks with various of the parties involved,

including the city administration and the Tatars. He rejected the allegation that military personnel might be used to evict the squatters, saying he doubted "any troops would be involved at all." He promised to "work on it" and find a solution.

Possible Compromise

¶5. (U) On February 2, Simferopol Mayor Babenko spoke out against any attempts at violent resolution. On the same day, a Crimean NGO announced that Yekhanurov had met with the Prime Minister of Crimea, Viktor Plakida, in Kyiv and transferred 7.5 hectares of the disputed land to the city of Simferopol. This transfer would then make the compromise called for by the Mejlis possible.

Comment

¶6. (SBU) Land disputes involving the Crimean Tatars remain one of the most acute sources of interethnic tension in Ukraine. The Crimean Tatar community has long criticized the government for not doing enough to help it resettle after its return to Ukraine in the early 1990s. While the current dispute is not yet over, Minister Yekhanurov's personal involvement appears to have eased tensions and paved the way for a possible peaceful settlement.

TAYLOR